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MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION REPORT
FISCAL YEAR 1931

LETTER

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF AGRICULTURE,

TRANSMITTING

A REPORT OF THE MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDED JUNE 30, 1931

DECEMBER 8, 1931.—Referred to the Committee on Agriculture and ordered to be printed

MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION,
Washington, D. C., December 5, 1931.

The SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

SIR: In accordance with the provisions of section 3 of the act of Congress approved February 18, 1929 (45 Stat. 1222; U. S. Code, Suppl. IV, chap. 7a), I present herewith report of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for the fiscal year ended June 30, 1931.

Respectfully,

ARTHUR M. HYDE,
*Secretary of Agriculture,
Chairman Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.*

MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION, FISCAL YEAR 1931

SUMMARY OF THE YEAR'S WORK

The Migratory Bird Conservation Commission met on December 18, 1930, to consider the program presented by the Secretary of Agriculture for the purchase or lease of lands recommended by the Chief, Bureau of Biological Survey, as suitable for migratory-bird refuges. The present report summarizes the work in migratory-bird refuge establishment to the termination of the second year of activities under the migratory-bird conservation act of February 18, 1929 (45 Stat. 1222; U. S. Code, Sup. IV, ch. 7a).

Purchases or leases of areas hereinafter described were this year approved by the commission at its meeting for the following migratory-bird refuges: St. Marks Refuge, Fla.; Swanquarter Refuge, N. C.; Crescent Lake Refuge, Nebr.; and Salton Sea Refuge, Calif.

Section 6 of the migratory-bird conservation act provides that the State in which proposed refuge areas lie "shall have consented by law to the acquisition by the United States of lands in that State." Forty States have by legislative act given the necessary authority to acquire refuges within their boundaries—all except New Hampshire, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Arkansas, Idaho, Washington, and Utah.

Congress made \$200,000 available to the Bureau of Biological Survey for the fiscal year 1931 with which to pursue the activities authorized by the migratory-bird conservation act, including investigations of wild-fowl foods within proposed refuges, studies of duck sickness, administration of established refuges, and examinations, appraisals, purchase negotiations, boundary surveys, and title examinations of lands being acquired for refuge purposes. It also appropriated by the same act \$5,000 for the expenses of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.

Since July 1, 1930, 204 areas in 48 States, embracing an aggregate of 3,983,696 acres had been investigated by the Biological Survey to determine their migratory-bird food resources, existing and potential. During the year detailed examinations also were made of the lands within 75 units in 31 States, containing 1,796,158 acres, to determine accurately the types of land, their vegetative cover, the uses made of land and cover, and the character and extent of improvements. Complete ownership data have been compiled, and related valuation studies made. At the close of the fiscal year, such investigations were completed in 48 States on 115 units, embracing 3,021,158 acres. These disclose that the lands examined are owned by 5,955 individuals, the average size of each holding being 507.33 acres. With the average size of the proposed refuges 26,271 acres, approximately 52 separate purchase transactions will be involved in each acquisition.

Table 1 sets forth the results of acquisition work up to the termination of the fiscal year 1931, including purchases, leases, and the setting aside of public lands. Progress in the direction of purchases was limited only by the funds available.

TABLE 1.—*Progress in the acquisition of land and water areas under the migratory-bird conservation act, to June 30, 1931*

State and county	Refuge	Areas approved for purchase	Areas acquired by purchase	Areas acquired by Executive order	Total areas acquired
		<i>Acres</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Acres</i>	<i>Acres</i>
California: Imperial.....	Salton Sea.....	8,982.12		15,733.43	15,733.43
Colorado: Alamosa.....	San Luis Lake.....	¹ 5,180.30			
Florida:					
Jefferson.....	St. Marks.....	5,930.89	5,846.59		5,846.59
Taylor.....	do.....	438.00			
Wakulla.....	do.....	7,613.68	6,973.68		6,973.68
Total Florida.....		13,982.57	12,820.27		12,820.27
Montana:					
Cascade.....	Benton Lake.....			¹ 11,954.92	11,954.92
Chouteau.....	do.....			¹ 280.00	280.00
Total Montana.....				12,234.92	12,234.92
Nebraska: Garden.....	Crescent Lake.....	² 39,038.72		173.39	173.39
Nevada: Churchill.....	Fallon.....			17,901.94	17,901.94
North Carolina: Hyde.....	Swanquarter.....	11,778.40			
Oklahoma: Alfalfa.....	Salt Plains.....			¹ 18,683.59	18,683.59
South Carolina: Charleston.....	Cape Romain.....	¹ 232,555.00			
Grand total.....		111,517.11	12,820.27	64,727.27	77,547.54

¹ Fiscal year 1930.² Tracts under lease and purchase.

In the report of this commission for the fiscal year 1930, a brief description was given of the several refuges that had been established by Executive order and approved for acquisition by purchase in that fiscal year. These were the Benton Lake Refuge, Mont., and the Salt Plains Refuge, Okla.—both established by Executive order; and the San Luis Lake Refuge, Colo., and the Cape Romain Refuge, S. C., both approved for purchase by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission.

NEW REFUGES ESTABLISHED BY EXECUTIVE ORDER, 1931

SALTON SEA MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

The Salton Sea Migratory Bird Refuge, in Imperial County, Calif., is in the extreme southern part of that State, and embraces submerged and marginal lands in the lower extremity of Salton Sea. A remarkable feature of Salton Sea is that the surface of the water is about 230 feet below sea level. At one time there was no water there, but in 1905 the Colorado River broke out of its channel and inundated hundreds of square miles of this large depression. As the southern end of the lake thus formed lends itself admirably to the purposes contemplated under the migratory bird conservation act, the President, by Executive order of November 25, 1930, set aside 15,733 acres of public lands there for refuge purposes. Intermingled with these lands are about 8,982 acres under private ownership, which were taken under an agreement of purchase after approval by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission during the fiscal year, to

round out a refuge of 24,715 acres. This refuge is in the direct line of flight of migratory birds that traverse the Pacific coast flyways. The more common species frequenting the area are the pintail, mallard, shoveler, green-winged teal, widgeon, lesser scaup, redhead, ruddy duck, coot, avocet, yellow-legs, dowitcher, willet, American egret, great blue heron, and white pelican. One of the notable features of this refuge is that it controls the Salton Sea's two principal fresh-water inlets.

FALLON MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

The Fallon Migratory Bird Refuge, situated in Churchill County, Nev., is part of the only extensive marsh area in the western part of that State. Its importance as a bird refuge can not be overemphasized, and its wild-fowl food resources are equaled by few other areas in the United States. The area is made up of alternate sections of Government-owned lands, of which 17,902 acres were set aside by Executive order of April 22, 1931. The intermingled privately owned lands are subject to purchase negotiations.

The pintail is the dominant species of this refuge, with mallards, shovelers, and green-winged and cinnamon teals abundant. Some gadwalls frequent the area, as also do numbers of coots. Dowitchers and western sandpipers are present in season by thousands and feed in the shallow waters and the mud flats within the refuge. Other waterfowl finding sanctuary there are geese, gulls, northern phalaropes, killdeers, avocets, Wilson's snipe, yellow-legs, white pelicans, ibises, black-crowned night herons, great blue herons, and white herons.

LANDS APPROVED FOR PURCHASE, 1931

At the meeting of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission on December 18, 1930, the Secretary of Agriculture presented a program of proposed acquisitions recommended by the Chief of the Biological Survey for its consideration. The commission authorized purchases or leases for establishing the following refuges:

ST. MARKS MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

The St. Marks Migratory Bird Refuge is situated in Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor Counties, Fla., and extends for approximately 14 miles along Apalachee Bay. The total area embraced within the exterior limits is 21,076 acres, of which 13,983 acres were approved by the commission for purchase. The remaining lands are subject to negotiations, and recommendation for acquisition approval will be placed before the commission when the Biological Survey reaches satisfactory price agreements with the owners.

This refuge is noted as a wintering ground for Canada geese. The ducks most abundant on this area are scaups, black ducks, pintails, and blue-winged and green-winged teals, while some canvasbacks and a few mergansers inhabit the area in season. Shore birds also are found there in great abundance. Many breed there, including the clapper rail, which is conspicuous in this regard. Many Wilson's and snowy plovers also are observed.

SWANQUARTER MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

The Swanquarter Migratory Bird Refuge as now constituted contains 11,778 acres of land, with approximately 20,000 acres of intermingled water area, and is situated in Pamlico Sound and within the confines of Hyde County, N. C. Upon completion of negotiations to reach price agreement satisfactory to the Biological Survey, the acquisition of the several tracts covered by agreement of purchase was approved by the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission. This area is in the direct line of flight of the migratory birds frequenting the east coast. It is a notable resting and feeding area for swans. Other game birds commonly and abundantly found there are redheads and scaups, with some canvasbacks, black duck, and brant. Many geese also will find sanctuary here, and even under conditions prevailing prior to the establishment of the refuge they congregated within the limits in large numbers. Negotiations with the owners of other lands needed here are in progress.

CRESCENT LAKE MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

One of the outstanding purchases of the year was the 39,039 acres of land embraced within the Crescent Lake Migratory Bird Refuge in Garden County, Nebr. This unit is in the west-central part of the State in the famous sandhill region, known to every sportsman as a favorite nesting area for ducks and other forms of migratory wild life. This site was selected for purchase after more than 200,000 acres of land in Nebraska had been thoroughly investigated by the Biological Survey. The numerous lakes, ponds, and potholes scattered throughout this refuge, and their freedom from alkali and other contamination, mark it as of outstanding value for a bird sanctuary. After protracted negotiations by the Biological Survey with the largest owners, and the reaching of a satisfactory price agreement, the case was presented to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission for its consideration. Approval was given for the lease and acquisition of these lands. Through the lease it was possible to put the area under administration immediately and to exercise jurisdiction pending the completion of title examination and the conveyance of the lands by deed to the United States.

The migratory birds found in greatest abundance on the Crescent Lake Refuge are pintails, mallards, blue-winged and cinnamon teals, ruddy ducks, coots, grebes, canvasbacks, baldpates, shovelers, gadwalls, and Canada and snow geese. The shore birds most common are the long-billed curlews and avocets; yellow-legs and various sandpipers also are abundant.

SALTON SEA MIGRATORY BIRD REFUGE

In addition to the areas on the Salton Sea Migratory Bird Refuge, as established by Executive order in 1931, a description of which is given on page 3, the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission approved the acquisition of 8,982 acres of privately owned lands intermingled with the public lands. Through this acquisition practically all lands needed to establish an effective migratory-bird refuge have been brought under jurisdiction of the Biological

Survey. A few tracts remain to be acquired that might contribute to more effective administration. It is planned to purchase these when reasonable terms can be reached.

RÉSUMÉ

The examinations conducted by the Biological Survey have embraced most of the extensive areas in the United States known to be attractive to migratory birds as well as many of doubtful value for migratory-bird refuges. These investigations disclose that many of the places preeminently suited to the birds, by reason of natural environment, food resources, and geographic situation in the heavy flight lanes, have generally been preempted by hunting clubs. Especially is this the case in those parts of the United States having the largest population. It also appears that many once-famous nesting and feeding areas have been forever destroyed by drainage, frequently without commensurate benefit to agriculture.

EXPENSES OF THE COMMISSION

Of the \$5,000 available for expenses of the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission, \$382.30 was expended for travel, \$333.34 for salary of stenographer, and \$30.96 for miscellaneous accounts, totaling \$746.60.

Of the \$200,000 available to the Biological Survey, \$74,567.64 was expended for the employment and traveling expenses of personnel engaged on the examination of areas deemed suitable for refuges; and for purchase negotiations, title examinations, and topographic and cadastral surveys. Other expenditures of the bureau covered administration of refuges, purchase of equipment, and miscellaneous items.

PURCHASE POLICIES INDICATED

Good policy dictates that the primary network of refuges should normally comprise units of from 20,000 to 50,000 acres each. Such units have several advantages: They make for more nearly complete isolation; they offer a greater variety of attractions to more species of migratory birds; furthermore they lend themselves to more nearly ideal administrative arrangements than would smaller units. In arid portions of the West, however, less extensive sites must be acquired in the absence of areas of the maximum desirable standard.

Under the 10-year program, for which appropriations are authorized by the migratory-bird conservation act, the purpose will be to obtain throughout the country as many refuges as possible, where wild fowl may breed undisturbed, and rest and feed during their migrations. The program contemplates the establishment of refuges in all States of the Union offering such opportunities.

Since the money authorized to be appropriated is not made available at once, it will be impossible to acquire all the desirable refuges immediately. From a practical standpoint, therefore, it is unwise to designate publicly all areas that are under consideration, since lack of funds will postpone for five or more years the acquisition of many of the units. In the selection of lands for early purchase or lease as

sanctuaries for migratory waterfowl, the commission is considering those areas most urgently needed, particularly those that may now be purchased at prices lower than if acquisition is deferred.

MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Arthur M. Hyde (chairman) Secretary of Agriculture.

Robert P. Lamont, Secretary of Commerce.

Ray L. Wilbur, Secretary of the Interior.

Peter Norbeck, Senator from South Dakota.

Harry B. Hawes, Senator from Missouri.

Ernest R. Ackerman,¹ Representative from New Jersey.

Sam D. McReynolds, Representative from Tennessee.

Rudolph Dieffenbach (secretary) Bureau of Biological Survey.

¹ Died Oct. 18, 1931.



